

Hornung Ernest William

The Young Guard



Ernest Hornung
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E. W. Hornung

The Young Guard

CONSECRATION

CHILDREN we deemed you all the days
We vexed you with our care:
But in a Universe ablaze,
What was your childish share?
To rush upon the flames of Hell,
To quench them with your blood!
To be of England's flower that fell
Ere yet it brake the bud!
And we who wither where we grew,
And never shed but tears,
As children now would follow you
Through the remaining years;
Tread' in the steps we thought to guide,
As firmly as you trod;
And keep the name you glorified
Clean before matt and God.

LORD'S LEAVE

(1915)

NO Lord's this year: no silken lawn on which
A dignified and dainty throng meanders.
The Schools take guard upon a fierier pitch
Somewhere in Flanders.
Bigger the cricket here; yet some who tried
In vain to earn a Colour while at Eton
Have found a place upon an England side
That can't be beaten!
A demon bowler's bowling with his head —
His heart's as black as skins in Carolina!
Either he breaks, or shoots almost as dead
As Anne Regina;
While the deep-field-gun, trained upon your
stumps,
From concrete grand-stand far beyond the
bound'ry,
Lifts up his ugly mouth and fairly pumps
Shells from Krupp's foundry.
But like the time the game is out of joint —
No screen, and too much mud for cricket
lover;
Both legs go slip, and there's sufficient point
In extra cover!

Cricket? 'Tis Sanscrit to the super-Hun —
Cheap cross between Caligula and Cassius,
To whom speech, prayer, and warfare are all
one —

Equally gaseous!

Playing a game's beyond him and his hordes;
Theirs but to play the snake or wolf or
vulture:

Better one sporting lesson learnt at Lord's
Than all their Kultur...

Sinks a torpedoed Phoebus from our sight;
Over the field of play see darkness stealing;
Only in this one game, against the light
There's no appealing.

Now for their flares... and now at last the
stars...

Only the stars now, in their heavenly million,
Glisten and blink for pity on our scars
From the Pavilion.

LAST POST

(1915)

LAST summer, centuries ago,
I watched the postman's lantern glow,
As night by night on leaden feet
He twinkled down our darkened street.
So welcome on his beaten track,
The bent man with the bulging sack!
But dread of every sleepless couch,
A whistling imp with leathern pouch!
And now I meet him in the way,
And earth is Heaven, night is Day,
For oh! there shines before his lamp
An envelope without a stamp!
Address in pencil; overhead,
The Censor's triangle in red.
Indoors and up the stair I bound:
One from the boy, still safe, still sound!
"Still merry in a dubious trench
They've taken over from the French;
Still making light of duty done;
Still full of Tommy, Fritz, and fun!
Still finding War of games the cream,
And his platoon a priceless team —
Still running it by sportsman's rule,

Just as he ran his house at school.
"Still wild about the 'bombing stunt'
He makes his hobby at the front.
Still trustful of his wondrous luck —
Prepared to take on old man Kluck!"
Awed only in the peaceful spells,
And only scornful of their shells,
His beaming eye yet found delight
In ruins lit by flares at night,
In clover field and hedgerow green,
Apart from cover or a screen,
In Nature spurting spick-and-span
For all the devilries of Man.
He said those weeks of blood and tears
Were worth his score of radiant years.
He said he had not lived before —
Our boy who never dreamt of War!
He gave us of his own dear glow,
Last summer, centuries ago.
Bronzed leaves still cling to every bough.
I don't waylay the postman now.
Doubtless upon his nightly beat
He still comes twinkling down our street.
I am not there with straining eye —
A whistling imp could tell you why.

THE OLD BOYS (1917)

WHO is the one with the empty sleeve?"

"Some sport who was in the swim."

"And the one with the ribbon who's home on
leave?"

"Good Lord! I remember *him!*

A hulking fool, low down in the school,

And no good at games was he —

All fingers and thumbs – and very few chums.

(I wish he'd shake hands with me!)"

"Who is the one with the heavy stick,

Who seems to walk from the shoulder?"

"Why, many's the goal you have watched him
kick!"

"He's looking a lifetime older.

Who is the one that's so full of fun —

I never beheld a blither —

Yet his eyes are fixt as the furrow betwixt?"

"He cannot see out of either,"

"Who are the ones that we cannot see,

Though we feel them as near as near?

In Chapel one felt them bend the knee,

At the match one felt them cheer.

In the deep still shade of the Colonnade,

In the ringing quad's full light,
They are laughing here, they are chaffing there,
Yet never in sound or sight."

"Oh, those are the ones who never shall leave,
As they once were afraid they would!
They marched away from the school at eve,
But at dawn came back for good,
With deathless blooms from uncoffin'd tombs
To lay at our Founder's shrine.

As many are they as ourselves to-day,
And their place is yours and mine."

"But who are the ones they can help or harm?"

"Each small boy, never so new,
Has an Elder Brother to take his arm,
And show him the thing to do —
And the thing to resist with a doubled fist,
If he'd be nor knave nor fool —
And the Game to play if he'd tread the way
Of the School behind the school."

RUDDY YOUNG GINGER (1915)

RUDDY young Ginger was somewhere in camp,
War broke it up in a day,
Packing cadets of the steadier stamp
Home with the smallest delay.
Ginger braves town in his O.T.C. rags —
Beards a Staff Marquis – the limb!
Saying, "Your son, Sir, is one of my fags,"
Gets a Commission through him.
Then to his tailor's for khaki *complet*;
Then to Pall Mall for a sword;
Lastly, a wire to his people to say,
"Left school – joined the Line – are you
bored?"
And it *was* a bit cool
(A term's fees in the pool
By a rule of the school).
There were those who said "Fool!"
Of young Ginger.
Ruddy young Ginger! Who gave him that name?
Tommies who had his own nerve!
"Into 'im, Ginger!" was heard in a game
With a neighbouring Special Reserve.
Blushing and grinning and looking fifteen,

Ginger, with howitzer punt,
Bags his man's wind as succinctly and clean
As he hopes to bag Huns at the front.
Death on recruits who fall out by the way,
Sentries who yawn at their post,
Yet he sang such a song at the Y.M.C.A.
That the C.O. turned green as a ghost!
Less the song than the stance,
And the dissolute dance,
Drew a glance so askance
That... they packed him to France,
Little Ginger.
Next month, to the haunts of fine Ladies and
Lords
I ventured, in Grosvenor Square:
The stateliest chambers were hospital wards —
And ruddy young Ginger was there.
In spite of his hurts he looked never so red,
Nor ever less shy or sedate,
Though his hair had been cropped (by machine-
gun, he said)
And bandages turbaned his pate.
He was mostly in holes – but his cheek was
intact!
I could not but notice, with joy,
The loveliest Sisters had most to transact
With ruddy young Ginger – some boy!
Slaying Huns by the tons,
With a smile like a nun's —

Oh! of all the brave ones,
All the sons of our guns —
Give me Ginger!

THE BALLAD OF ENSIGN JOY

I T is the story of
Ensign Joy
And the obsolete
rank withal
That I love for each gentle English
boy
Who jumped to his country's
call.
By their fire and fun, and the
deeds they've done,
I would gazette them Second to
none
Who faces a gun in Gaul!)

IT is also the story of Ermyntrude
A less appropriate name
For the dearest prig and the
prettiest prude!
But under it, all the same,
The usual consanguineous squad
Had made her an honest child
of God —
And left her to play the game.

IT was just when the grind of
the Special Reserves,
Employed upon Coast Defence,
Was getting on every Ensign's
nerves —
Sick-keen to be drafted
hence —
That they met and played tennis
and danced and sang,
The lad with the laugh and the
schoolboy slang,
The girl with the eyes intense.

YET it wasn't for him that she
languished and sighed,
But for all of our dear deemed
youth;
And it wasn't for her, but her
sex, that he cried,
If he could but have probed
the truth !
Did she? She would none of his
hot young heart;
As khaki escort he's tall and
smart,
As lover a shade uncouth.

HE went with his draft. She
returned to her craft.

He wrote in his merry vein:
She read him aloud, and the
Studio laughed!
Ermyntrude bore the strain.
He was full of gay bloodshed and
Old Man Fritz:
His flippancy sent her friends
into fits.
Ermyntrude frowned with
pain.

HIS tales of the Sergeant who
swore so hard
Left Ermyntrude cold and
prim;
The tactless truth of the picture
jarred,
And some of his jokes were
grim.
Yet, let him but skate upon
tender ice,
And he had to write to her twice
or thrice
Before she would answer him.

YET once she sent him a

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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